

EXPLOSIVE RUNES

19

the official magazine of RPGCrossing.com



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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the nineteenth issue of *Explosive Runes*!

It is the holiday season and the staff at Explosive Runes would like to wish you and yours Happy Holidays. In the spirit of the season, this issue provides some holiday inspired material: Gift suggestions for DMs, Use of holidays in your campaign, Holiday RPG Crossing Story, and a Holiday themed adventure.

We have added a new section to the magazine, RPG Crossing Cadets. We hope to promote RPG related art from the children of site members. If you would like to submit a contribution, check out the [RPG Crossing Cadets Thread](#).

We hope you enjoy the new material and features, expanding your RPG possibilities and introducing some new gaming ideas to help our community grow.

Are you looking to get a writing or art gig? Want to help make RPG Crossing a very special place? Then get your work put in *Explosive Runes* and enjoy the satisfaction that comes with a job well done. For more information about this, please contact [me](#).

Now get out there and roll some dice!

~EngrInAZ

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Assistant Editors: RonarsCorruption, Grogg Tree, Dirkoth, Solomon777, Aethera, Still Pond & jj_wolven

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Charity Fundraiser & Membership Drive

Effective immediately and continuing through Thursday, Dec 26, 2013, \$5 of every new or renewed \$25 one year [Community Supporter membership](#) will be donated to support mental illness research with the [Brain and Behavior Research Foundation](#). To quote that organization, which has been vetted by the Better Business Bureau and seems as solid as any charity out there, its laudable goal is "To bring the joy of living to those affected by mental illness - those who are ill and their families and friends." The foundation does its work by awarding research grants.

If we reach last year's donation amount of USD\$315 (63 memberships sold), we will add an extra month to the recipient of every one year CS purchased during this drive. Visit the [RPG Crossing December Membership Drive and Charity Fundraiser Thread](#) for more information!

Authors

The RPG Crossing community loves to support all of our published authors. Not just here in Explosive Runes, but also site-wide. We've compiled a list of all site authors (that we know of) and all of their work, [right here on the site](#).

If you have published something you'd like to share, send a PM to [Birched](#) to be included.

New Player Solo Game

The NPSG has been running since 2007, created by Artsoldier35 (artwork), Symthrell (module), Ridin Gaijin (maps). The first NPSG DMs were CEJ2RH and Symthrell. Since then, scores of players have participated and a number of loyal members have volunteered their time as NPSG DMs.

As of Dec 1st, 463 players have graduated from the NPSG. Visit [The Graduate List](#) to see who all has completed the quest.

The current NPSG DMs are:

Aethera	lymphomaniac
Antebellum	mad_gondsman
Battlechaser	Nimlos
Captain Devonin	sammichweasel
Digorig	Solomon777
Dirkoth	Syberpuppy
EngrInAZ	Admin Toad` (Grave)
Grogg Tree	Zeppo007
Hextor	zevonian
hvg3akaek	

The former DMs:

Arucard	Nocturnal
Ascendant	Olorian
CE2JRH	Peter172
Chrystrom	Rjking
Dinkleberg	Roaddog41
Doderic	Ronarscorruption
Elwen	Saros
Embrodak	Securis
Golrader	Admin Sedracus
Idilippy	Stocks
Jayrob	Symthrell
Jkaen	TheEllimist
Kdkatz	Admin Chuck
Kiiz	TheKeck
Kinbensha	UncaJJ
LordJecks	Vetinarus
MadSatyr	Virulain
Master of Monsters	Zhefonyll



The Trophy Case

Who's Won What

Post of the Month

Despite our name change, the Post of The Month competition is still running strong On RPG Crossing, and it continues to highlight some of the finest work by site members on a monthly basis.

The 2013 Winners:

August: [kdtompos](#)!

September: [zevonian](#)!

October: [Ytterbium](#)!

(Clicking on the name of any of the winners will take you directly to their winning entry.)



Iron DM

The dust settles, the crowds peer downwards, and a collective breath is held. Which of the two great DMs will be crowned the **Iron DM**? Both have travelled far, coming from opposite sides and bringing many servings of great stories for us to feast upon, but as we all know only too well, only one can stand victorious at the end!

Each of the judges residing over this match have had a difficult time determining their vote, a statement in itself to the fine calibre of DM we have before us! But each has given their decision, and they stand unanimous, if only barely: with a score of 5-0, **Bade** defeats Aeternis, and claims the title of Iron DM for 2013!! Congratulations!

Well done to Aeternis, too, who put together a strong and contestable final entry, to match the caliber of his previous rounds. And well done to each and every other participant, in each of the other rounds. Thank you to the judges who scrutinized and weighed up each match in every round, whose critique and feedback will hopefully help to raise the standard of not only the participants, but the crowds watching! And thank you to the masses that watched and read each entry! Practice those skills, and come back next year to challenge Bade for your own chance of becoming... the **Iron DM**!!

Short Story Competition

In the library lives a monthly challenge to write a short story started by the wonderful Klazzform a few years ago and more recently picked up by Aethera. Each month a theme is posted, along with three additional challenge elements that are optional, just for the challenge of incorporating random items into your story. We have great stories submitted each month, so come visit us on [the forum](#)!

For 2013, we're trying out a quarterly prize system. So far it seemed to garner a bit more interest in the competition, for who doesn't like winning a prize? We are currently voting for the Fall 2013 quarter, and a three-month site subscription will be awarded at the end of December when the poll closes. Please take a moment to read the great stories that won for September and November, and maybe [\[vote for your favorite\]](#)! Even though we didn't have an October competition, TeufelHeunden was good enough to [share a noir tale](#) anyway.

Because I'm behind in sharing results, the monthly winners for [Spring](#) and [Summer](#) can be found on the forum.



Spring 2013 Winner

The Experiment

by Spankucus (March 2013)

The Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum of Doctor Frankenstein's epic following, this story centers around the creation of a golem by two odd brothers, gnome inventors of the highest degree. The arguments are absolutely hilarious, perfectly impossible as only the arguments of the close relations can be.

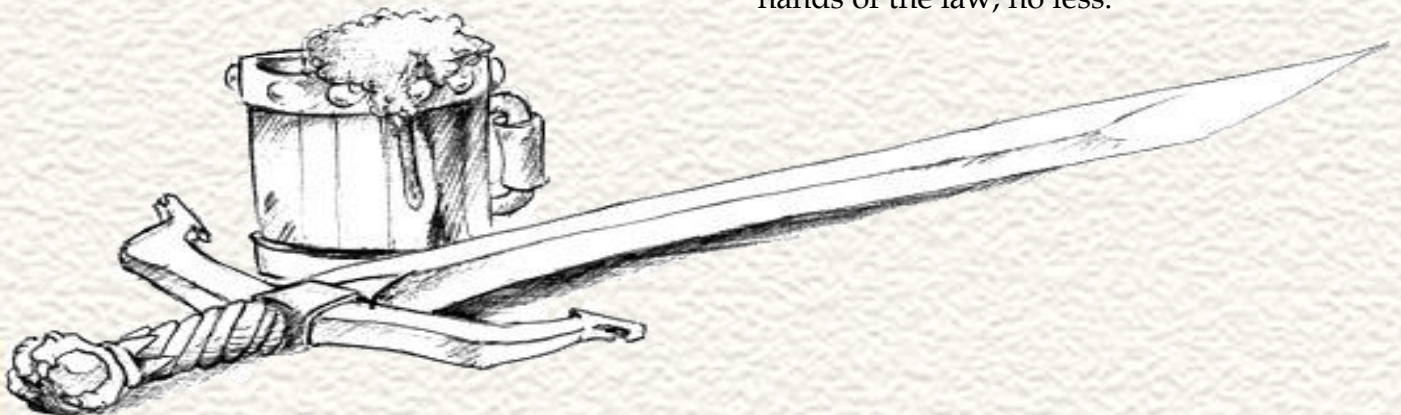


Summer 2013 Winner

Out of the Fire

by sammichweasel (July 2013)

Out of the frying pan, more like. This story is set after a botched job, with a cybernetically-enhanced mob boss less than pleased that his courier had failed to deliver, and let the package fall into the hands of the law, no less.



Short Story



Spring/March 2013

Winner:

The Experiment
by Spankucus

"It doesn't go there."

Flaxton Mecherton cocked his head to one side, looking quizzically through his goggles at his brother, Klaxton. **"How would you know it doesn't go there? It's a foot. That's a leg. Even a goblin tinker would know a foot attaches to a leg,"** Flaxton, or Flax, retorted.

Klaxton Mecherton snorted and pointed at the large foot he held, as large as either's head. **"Even a goblin tinker knows the greater phalanges are positioned interior of the lesser, single-circuit brain!"**

Flax swung his bald head back around to the foot, his full white mutton chops *whoosing* through the air. He momentarily regarded the large, crafted foot. Partially flesh, partially machine, with a single connecting male port protruding from the top awaiting connection with the female port of a leg. The foot had no "L", "R", or other directional symbols on it. However, his brother, when creating this, had left the original bulbous, knotty, and fungal ogre toes in place.

And said toes clearly went from small to large.

"Well, it doesn't matter to what leg I stick a foot. I crafted the skeletal frame ports to be universal. I could stick a head here if I wanted," Flax said, turning back to his brother Klax.

Klax was unimpressed, stroking his frazzled beard aloofly as he was wont to do when perceiving another debate won.

Few things infuriated Flax more than his brother's smug attitude. **"At least if I put a head here, I'd have someone intelligent to talk to!"**

Klax was taken aback, stuttering and puffing himself up with righteous indignation. **"Wha, wha, wha, what, What, WHAT!?!?!?"** Klax stammered, pulling his long white beard randomly in frustration. **"You know nothing of humanoid golem construction, you second rate parts fetcher! Obviously, inward positioning of superior digits promotes stable bipedal locomotive operations! I'll not have my experiment 478-B clumsily stumble about like you did last Gond Day!"**

"Me! ME! Stumbling! Clumsily!" Flax squeals, at a lost for words, shaking with anger. **"You're the one that bought us the 'Around the Realms' drink card! And as I remember it . . . !" Flax continued, setting the foot down to wave a finger in Klax's face.**

And so Flax and Klax did what they, arguably, did best: argue. Both deriding the other's faculties. Both repeatedly changing the subject. Both feeding off the other's energy. And both, though they'd never admit it (and frankly, one would never suspect), loved every second of it.

They verbally abused each other next to an approximately ten foot tall partial flesh and partial machine golem. The brothers had worked on numerous projects over the decades. From alchemy to engineering, from flight to submersibles, the brothers had contributed about as much to science and invention as they'd set it back with their hair-brained, half-baked, and utterly insane theories, approaches, and practices. If one could untangle the useful and the useless of Mecherton works, one's knowledge would rival Ioun himself. But no one ever had. And the Mecherton brothers lacked the wisdom,

perspective, and humility to admit error and thus separate truth from folly.

"And so that's why," Flax triumphantly stated, **"the foot should be placed so the largest toe is on the inside."**

"You place that foot wherever you want but if your creation so much as trips in my laboratory, I will hold you personally responsible!" Klax declared.

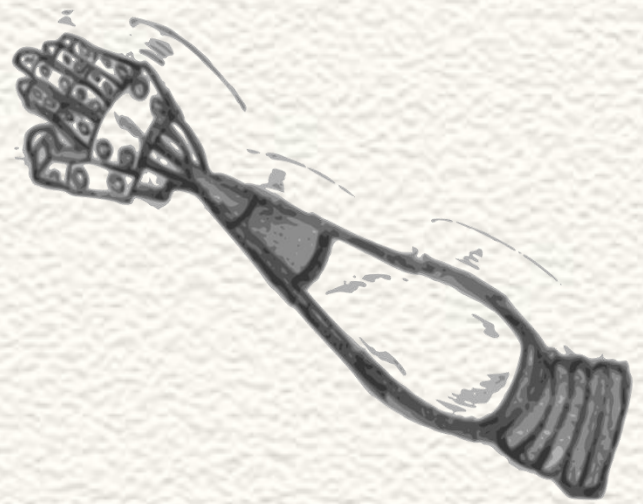
"It won't," Flax replied and snapped the foot into place.

Klax hefted the other foot and snapped it into place. And the brothers went to work, making the final connections, adjustments, and alignments, their prior discussion completely forgotten.

As of late, the brothers had been focusing on the juncture of nature and machine without resorting to necromancy or, really, any arcane art even partially dependent on divinity. They had reasonable experience gathering and channeling raw arcane energies as power for numerous smaller constructs. They had even invented a device capable of delivering a sharp, sudden arcane shock to a dying lifeform, potentially reviving it. Their name for it, the *Soulshocker 3000* had perhaps stymied widespread adoption; but, marketing had never been the Mecherton brothers' strong suit. Or paramount concern.

Their latest endeavor involved autonomous automation. Golems had certainly existed since time immemorial. But most were wholly mechanical or magical constructs. Some had been a jumble of mechanical and magical subsystems, each interacting to form a cohesive unit, but still maintaining their distinct nature.

The brothers sought to seamlessly form the mechanical and arcane together, both working indistinct from the other, as one on the subsystem level. Today, their latest



attempt laid upon their specially made workbench, physically complete and ready for power.

"Run a level 2 diagnostic," Klax said, as he moved to the read-out console, ready to examine the diagnostic results.

"Level 1 diagnostic underway," Flax responded, working a series of knobs and levers on a panel built into the workbench.

Klax closely examined the read-outs, too absorbed to tell Flax why a level 1 diagnostic was unnecessary. Besides, the data was fascinating and riveted Klax's attention fully.

"Actuator 48B reads outside parameters," Klax said. **"That's the same one you replaced yesterday. And sprocket S59-6. No, correction. S60-6. Didn't you replace that one yesterday too?"**

Flax moved to the parts bin, fishing out another actuator and sprocket. Flax then walked toward the construct.

Klax was so absorbed in the diagnostic results that he almost didn't catch Flax walk straight from the parts bins to the workbench and pop open an access panel.

Almost.

Suddenly, it hit Klax. He quickly shrieked

"STOP!" halting Flax dead in his tracks. Klax whipped around and grasped the handrails, face full of distraught and horror. Even his beard burst out of his face as if the individual hairs were electrically charged. **"What do you think you are doing!!?!"**

Flax regarded the two parts. Actuator 48B and sprocket S60-6 were standard issue. And he was holding the correct replacement parts. He looked at them. And again. And again. His mind raced. What was wrong?

Suddenly, it too hit Flax. His face brightened momentarily at the "Ah ha!" realization. But then, Flax's face darkened as the magnitude of what was wrong settled upon him.

"I didn't rub them against the Lucky Gear," Flax meekly said, looking at Klax.

Klax straightened, crossing his arms, and looking down on his sheepish brother. **"You didn't rub them against the Lucky Gear,"** he repeated flatly.

All work stop. Under Klax's watchful eye, Flax walked to the other end of the shop, up a raised dais, to a glass casing enclosing a spring-suspended gear. Visually, the gear was standard GI 6-1-12 gear: six inches in diameter from a one inch star-shaped hole lined with twelve large teeth around the gear's circumference. Scratched, slightly chipped, and scorched with black and red blotches, one could barely still read the ubiquitous "Gondulum Industries" factory inscription encircling the middle hole.

The gear had been the only whole piece salvaged from their late father's rocket sled wreckage. Before being blasted into tiny bits across almost a hundred snowy acres, the sled had been a wild success -- for about three seconds. Then, the craft erupted in shooting flames, drowning out their oblivious father's scream of engineering ecstasy. The flaming sled had then shot straight up, blasting hundreds of feet into the air, and exploded, bursting larger than any

Gond Day fireworks display (and that's saying something).

It had been a good death, enviable by witnesses, first and second-hand, for years afterwards. He was posthumously promoted to Exalted Engineer, Ninth Degree, and his inventions recorded in the great Technical Manual of Gondulum, complete with an unprecedented three appendixes of designs, calculations, and equations. Even the smallest bits of the wreckage had sold for almost sordid sums, entire fortunes spent simply to have and cherish a piece of Gondulum history. The brothers, having been partners in their father's enterprise, reaped huge profits, that they quickly reinvested in their next scheme.

But they simply could not part with the only piece found intact. And since that time, the brothers had fastidiously touched every material utilized in their work to the gear in a superstitious ritual intended to somehow impart their father's luck and genius to their present works. Over time, devotions had become automatic and brief, simply touching each utilized material to the gear swiftly, even conveyor belt style when the brothers batch processed a pail of screws, bolts, or nuts.

But forgetting to touch an item to the Lucky Gear was blasphemous. Arguments over failed projects often degraded into cross accusations of who forgot to touch something to the Lucky Gear, rather than about what actually went wrong.

Flax reverently opened the glass casing and slowly, carefully, rubbed the actuator and sprocket against the Lucky Gear. Klax absently brushed his bread back down, pulled up his goggles, and solemnly lowered his head, his earlier subtle accusation that Flax has not rubbed the original parts on the Lucky Gear forgotten.

For a moment, the shop was quieted, only instruments and the main power source

faintly hummed, dinged, and whirred in the background.

Having respectfully rubbed each item to the Lucky Gear, Flax carefully stepped back and closed the glass casing. He then turned and looked into this brother's eyes from across the room. Klax looked back. And, for the briefest of moment, the brothers appreciated their place in existence.

And, as if telepathically agreed upon, the brothers sprang back into furious action.

Flax rushed to their experiment, spare parts in hand. Klax whirled back to the read-out console, snapping his goggles back down, and looking for more anomalous readings. Flax deftly replaced the faulty parts with the new, properly sanctified, ones, tossing the old ones into the reclamation bin. Flax then sprinted to the diagnostic console, starting a level 1 diagnostic anew. Klax rapidly scanned the read-out. He checked and doubled checked for indications of trouble. Loose wiring, weak connections, pooled energies, or subsystems starved of energy. He checked power flows, relay channels, biometric data, and core temperatures. Flax

isolated certain subsystems and partially powered them, calling them out to Klax who checked individual subsystem read-outs for unanticipated fluctuations. Their printer spat out a ticker tape of complex alphanumeric codes and symbols. Results were checked. Double checked. Triple checked.

The boys were in their element.

And soon the experiment was ready.

Both brothers stood, looking blankly at their screens, knobs, buttons, and toggles. Slowly, together, they turned and looked at each other, Klax by the read-out console, Flax by the diagnostic console. Flax absently stroked his mutton chops and Klax his beard. There was only one thing left to do.

Turn it on.

Like they shared a mind, the realization hit them together.

Quickly, Flax ran across the room to the main power station. But Klax was right behind him.

"I'll turn it on, you check the readings!" Flax shouted, reaching behind and pushing his brother back.

"No, I will engage main power and YOU will check the readings!" shouted an equally motivated Klax, pulling his brother back from behind.

Both tussled to the main power station more or less together and began pushing and shoving each other anew on the rubberized grated platform.

"You've been at the read-out console this whole time! You're familiar with the readings! You know what to look for!" Flax argued, knocking his brother's hand back from a knob.



"You can read the data just as well as I!" Klax retorted, trying to reach around Flax. **"Besides, last time you accelerated the energy flow beyond established parameters leading to a cascade reaction!"** Klax argued.

Flax looked offended, his bushy eyebrows raising almost to his bald pate. **"Me! Cascade reaction!"** Flax spat back. **"It caught fire because YOU didn't read the data properly to TELL me the experiment had too much arcane energy!"**

Klax put his hands on his hips and stated, matter-of-factly **"I was watching for entropic emissions! If I knew you were going to fry the thing, I would have watched the power flow regulators closer!"**

"Well, now you can," Flax curtly stated, shoving Klax off the platform and starting to turn the power wheel.

Klax, seeing the wheel start to turn, shrieked and scampered back to the read-out console, the argument completely forgotten.

"Thirty-eight percent!" shouted Flax. The main power station began emit a low humming sound.

"Three-eight!" Klax acknowledged. **"Adjust the dampening field, down two points!"**

"Dampening field minus two!" Flax responded, turning a nearby dial slightly.

The machinery become increasingly louder as arcane energies scrambled free of their containment, through the opening main channel, and into the experiment.

"Sixty-six percent!" yelled Flax, barely audible.

Flax couldn't hear Klax's response. He glanced over his shoulder to see his brother still hunched over the read-out console. He wasn't waving frantically. All must be a go.

Flax turned the power up some more and

reduced the dampening field, maintaining the balance as best he could, madly running mental calculations.

Klax stood stupefied, reading the data blazing across the screen. It was working. It was actually working. Everything was green. The tape's readings were the same as on the console. It was truly actually really working. Klax's eyes and mouth started to open wide in shock.

Flax continued to work his station, increasing the power and reducing the dampening field. Lightning flashed around him, his electrically charged mutton chops sticking straight out like porcupine quills. His goggles darkened automatically as photonic emissions rose. He yelled out **"Ninety-nine percent!"** but could not even hear himself.

Klax wouldn't have heard him anyway even if the room had been silent. Klax stood at the foot of the bench, staring at the experiment rippling with blue lightning and arcs of yellow, red, and purple electricity. His goggles too, darkened at the sight, and his beard blasted out every which way. The read-out console whirled and chirped and spat out more tape into a heap on the floor. Klax didn't need it to tell him it was working.

"One hundred percent!" screamed Flax, breathing heavily with exaltation. He looked over his shoulder to see his brother and the experiment while continuing to operate the main power station. Power up was complete. The final task was closing the channel connecting the experiment's power core with and the lab's arcane energy containment unit. Doing so would force energy to remain in the experiment, thus powering it. Flax turned back, focusing on his job. He flipped a switch to cause a rubber anti-magic disc to slide into the main channel, interrupting the flow.

Klax, meanwhile, was mesmerized, seeing history in the making. Scenes of awards, honors, degrees, and accolades being showered on him for his genius flashed

before him. He saw an army of automatons sweeping, mopping, cleaning, repairing, freeing all of civilization from the mundane tasks of life, enabling all to focus on study, science, technology, and achievement. He saw his place as an Exalted Engineer, Ninth, no Tenth!, Degree, leading his people into the future. Tears began to form in his eyes as a new life, a new beginning, opened before him.

What Klax did not see was the experiment coming to life, straining against the restraints, and breaking the restraints, the bolts holding the leather straps shooting past Klax's head like warning shots. Klax did not see the experiment sitting up and roam its beady red eyes around the room. And Klax did not see the experiment, with its partial ogre head, settle its gaze upon him, narrowing its vision, and move a meaty hand toward Klax, menacingly reaching for the little gnome.

When Klax's vision returned to the present, he saw his creation reaching for him.

"I am here, my child, my wondrous child! Come to me!" Klax whispered, reaching out to embrace his success.

The experiment leaned toward the reaching and awe-struck Klax, forming a mighty fist, high in the air.

Suddenly, a spectacular discharge emanated from behind the experiment, dimming the lights and filling the lab with the din of raw power. The experiment, silhouetted against the light, rippled with energy, engulfed in extreme power. It thunderously roared in pain and agony, its raised arm convulsing randomly, its body shaking uncontrollably, white smoke fuming from its ears, mouth, nose, eyes, fingers, and any opening or seam.

Just as suddenly, the discharge stopped and the smoking husk, eyes no longer lite red, collapsed on the floor in a heap of science gone terribly, terribly, wrong.

Klax, still reaching out, then saw his brother standing on the workbench. Flax visibly shuttered as residual energy sparked through and around him. His goggles black, his mutton chops fried, his whole body somewhat crispy, Flaxton Mecherton stood holding in each gloved hand a paddle of the original *Soulshocker 3000*.

As the excess energy dissipated from Flax, Klax lowered his arms and stood flat on the ground, his eyes still wide and mouth on the floor.

"Brother" Flax whispered hesitantly, staring across at Klax as both's goggles started to lighten and clear.

Klax stood silently, holding his pose of amazement and wonder, looking past Flax and simply into space.

"Broth" Flax started again.

"We did it," Klax said quietly. Blinking and looking directly at Flax as if for the first time. **"We did it!"** he said again, louder and starting to laugh. **"WE DID IT!"** he shouted, pumping his fists in the air and beginning to dance in place.

Flax lowered the paddles and smiled, relaxing. **"We did do it,"** he said. **"It actually worked,"** he said again. **"It really worked! It really, really, really, WORKED!"** he shouted, punching a paddle up for emphasis.

Klax laughed happily while doing his little jig and Flax joined in, dropping the paddles on the workbench, hopping over the still twitching experiment, and rushing over to Klax. The Mecherton brothers laughed and hugged and danced and slapped each other's backs, congratulating and complimenting the other on a job well done.

And soon they began discussing how better restraints could be constructed.



Everyone likes to give and get gifts around the holidays, so we at Explosive Runes have come up with some gift ideas for you to use during the holidays, or, during a holiday themed game. No effort has been made to balance these magical items into low magic, high magic, mid level games, that task remains up to you as the DM. To that end, we suggest that you alter the power levels, uses, and strength of the items as you see fit. For instance, you can make each item a onetime use gift; place it into your campaign, let it be found, perhaps mysteriously left at the campfire in the morning by an unseen nightly visitor, and limit the uses to no more than once, or perhaps once a year.

Or, feel free to alter the powers slightly, to fit better into your campaign. Instead of harvesting the silk from the magical spider, for example, and selling it for gold, you can declare it can be made into a special cloak that provides resistance for the wearer. Or, a special underarmor that adds +1 to armor class, or improve dexterity. Or, grants the wearer spiderclimb once per day.

The options are endless, we simply hope you enjoy the fun of the holidays, with these little gifts.

Glass Globes of Wonder

These bright and colorfully designed thin glass globes are typically found either singly, or by the dozen. They are typically the size of a large egg. Each globe can be thrown as a ranged splash weapon up to 30 feet, and upon impact, release the contents that were magically placed inside. The effects of the spells inside are either instantaneous, or last for 10 rounds. Red: Bursts as a half strength fireball spell Yellow: Bursts and creates a glowing ball of bright light, equal to a daylight spell. Blue: Bursts and releases a small water elemental under your control, for 10 rounds. Green: Bursts and releases a half strength/size cloud of Stinking Cloud.

Tinsel of Distraction

These thin strips of silvered paper are usually found as a tangled mass. The mass can be thrown up to 20 feet at any creature with an intelligence over 10, and on a failed save (DC 14 Will) that creature will stop for one round and take no other action except to attempt to untangle the strips from each other. If the creature makes their save, they are still bothered by the tangle, and lose their move action and are restricted to a standard action in that round only.

Sleigh Bells

These round metal bells come tied to a strap of leather, typically up to six bells on a strap. If removed, the bell(s) can be thrown up to 30 feet, and will induce an area of silence (per the spell) within a 15 foot radius. However, while carried (unless specifically wrapped to silence them), these bells always make noise with each step, and reduce a person's ability to move silently by 10.

Antlers of Flying

These magical antlers, always found as a pair, can be attached to any animal with four legs, and allow it to fly (as the fly spell) for 24 hours. However, the animal's fly speed is

100X faster than its standard land speed, and the creature is capable of lifting/hauling 100 times its normal weight capacity. After that, they are unable to be used for an entire year.



Icicle Spike Necklace

This necklace produces three effects. First, it grants the wearer the effects of an endure elements spell while worn. Second, it provides the wearer with energy resistance (fire) by absorbing the first 25 hitpoints of fire related damage per day. Third, it has a small, clear glass pendant shaped like an icicle that can be detached and thrown (up to 20 feet). When the glass crystal impacts any surface, it immediately spreads a layer of hard ice in a 30 foot radius, even on vertical surfaces. This ice functions as the grease spell, but is not flammable. Furthermore, this ice is jagged and rough, and has the effects of a patch of caltrops if something moves through it. This pendant can be used once per week, and once used, reforms slowly by growing imperceptibly over the week until it is a full sized icicle pendant again.

Hearth Stocking

This magical stocking is usually oversize, and gaily decorated. When hung on a fireplace, hearth, chimney or mantle overnight, the following morning one minor magical item will be found inside, of a nature similar to feather tokens.

Magical Candelabra

These (typically plain, simple) candelabras are designed to sit on a shelf, table, or mantle. They may hold three, four, or up to twelve candles. They are often found with only one or two candles remaining. If a properly blessed candle (magical) is placed in the holder and lit after sundown, it will provide a special magical effect, based upon the candle chosen. Unless otherwise stated, the candle will burn for 12 hours, without depleting. However at the end of the 12 hours, the candle's magic is gone forever.

There are candles that will do the following:

- Provide a sanctuary spell that extends 30 feet in all directions around the candelabra.
- Lock all doors and windows in a 30 foot radius against normal, physical entry. a DC 35 disable device check is required to defeat the magic, or 200 hitpoints of damage must be done to destroy the locked objects.
- Provide food and drink for 6 people for one meal
- Magically fill any unused containers placed within 10 feet of the candle with a good lamp oil, overnight.
- Magically cause to appear 1d10+2 random (magical) candles at the end of the night of burning.
- Remove fatigue and other health based conditions, restores hitpoints at double the resting rate normally applied.
- Provides a protection from Evil/Chaos for 30 radius
- Creates water, pure and potable, into any empty container in a 10' radius, as the create water spell
- Prevents poison from spreading in any creature within 30'r for the duration of the candle burning.
- Provides equivalent of endure elements on all creatures within 30'r for duration.
- Provides equivalent of hide undead spell for all creatures within 30'r for duration.
- Wards the area in a line 50' from the candle as per the alarm spell.
- Removes the effects of a charm, fear or enchantment spell on all creatures within 10'. This effect is temporary, and the creature will revert back under the effects when the candle goes out, if the effects last longer than the candle.
- Changes the status of all creatures within 30' to "friendly", if their status prior to the candle lighting was less than friendly. Improves status one step higher otherwise.

Parchments of Anti-srying

These very thin parchments are always found in a roll, around a thin hollow tube. They are always brightly colored, in reds, blues, greens, yellows, and often have bold lines, symbols, arcane sigils, or designs patterned on them. They are typically 3 feet wide, and 15 feet long when unrolled. When the parchment is wrapped around any box or other object so the object is completely covered, it magically adheres to the item, and prevents all srying attempts. In addition, if the "wrapper" states a date not more than one month in the future as he wraps the item, the parchment will resist all attempts short of a DC 35 disable device attempt to unwrap it until that date. At dawn on that day, the DC for unwrapping drops to 5.

Magical top

This small wooden top is typically four sided, with a conical bottom, and a small stick at the top used to spin it. Each of the four sides bears a magical symbol. The symbols are Nun, Gimel, Hei, and Shin. Once a day, the owner of the top can place a pouch of money, containing up to 25 gold, on the ground and spin the top near the pouch. When the top stops, whichever side of the top faces upright determines the results. Nun indicates that nothing happens with that day's spin. A roll of Gimel will cause the money in the pouch to be magically doubled. A roll of Hei will cause the money in the pot to grow by half. A roll of Shin will cause half the money in the pouch to disappear.

Kurohsu Hat

This red, velvet hat is a floppy conical shape, and often trimmed along the brim with a broad, ermine fur. The cone often ends in a tuft of white ermine fur as well. When worn, this cap provides a sense that you have eyes in the back of your head, and you are protected from flanking and sneak attacks while it is donned.

Silver spider

This small, magical totem is shaped like a tiny spider. However, once a year, if the spider is placed upon a fir tree and left overnight, it will spin webs of silver silk that will cover the tree. If carefully harvested, the silver silk thread can be sold for 500 gold in most markets.

Abominable Corn Cob Pipe

When smoked, this pipe protects the user from cold as the spell "endure elements". The effect lasts as long as the pipe is in their mouth. Further, smoking the pipe grants a +1 bonus to wisdom. If used often (DMs discretion), the user grows thick white fur all over their body that lasts for 1d4 weeks after their last smoke.



Short Story



Summer/July 2013

Winner:

Out of the Fire

by sammichweasel

The door jamb nuzzled back, its cool metal dragging a ragged sigh of relief from my beleaguered lungs. The fever had spiked a while back, probably around when I was hiding under a pile of broken tickers, but it was still nice to let the heat leech off a bit.

A step, and another, and my knee decided that was enough. I was surprised it had lasted as long as it had; typically, when a fast-traveling piece of shrapnel burrowed through skin and bone, a limb would up and quit. But no, Lefty had poured it on, holding it together in the face of probably irreparable damage, and had managed to get us home without any other life-threatening injuries.

It was my own fault, of course; there wouldn't have been any shrapnel if I had kept the inversion catch to myself. Something about implosive shockwaves in secondhand junk shops disagreed with my general non-perforated preferences. However, when your options are "possibly rupture something vital" or "go quietly with the Toppers", sometimes preferences got tossed to the wayside. Saldo would understand about the shop, given my choices; the question was if the Grinner would understand about the satchel. I had my doubts, there.

Glancing down at my now brown-red stained coat, I sneered a bit at my own stupidity before sliding the torn thing from my shoulders. A couple scabs pulled free, having secured themselves to the ratleather,

but I had to take full stock. Minor abrasions, a few contusions, the knee. A hole clear through my right forearm I wiggled a finger through. The tangle field had done its job fast and easy, with minimal blood loss; I'd have to compliment Saldo on that one. If I ever saw him again. My own stock of toys had been sorely depleted in the chase, but they had done what they were supposed to do - I wasn't in Topper custody, and no one in hobnailed boots, pneumatic armor, and a felted flat-crown was smashing in my door. It would take a while to get the parts to reassemble my utility coat, but I was alive for the time being.

The high tinkle of crystal settling on ceramic caught the thought in my throat.

I hacked out a cautious hullo, peering around the foyer wall and into my sitting room. I wished I hadn't. I couldn't see much, just the pressed gator of his shoes and the clear cut wine glass held above the shoulder of my armchair, but I knew both better than I should have liked. He started humming under his breath, that horrid shanty he used when working to keep his rhythm. A thick, wide-knuckled hand crooked at me, a wrinkled and scarred finger beckoning. I swallowed the scream that was trying to run away from me and turned the the corner, opting for the wicker basket chair instead of fainting to the floor, like I sorely wished.

He stopped humming, looking at me through one milky eye and one whirring electronic sphincter of a monacle-like implant. "Hi again, Niles. I think we have a problem." His voice dragged across the paving stones in his throat, echoing more in my jaw bone than my ear. His lips, stretched thin and pale, barely moved, only the faintest glimmer escaping his mouth.

"I... suppose one could call it a problem, but I see it more as an opportunity." My own voice was wind through moss, a faint whisper down one of the old tunnels. It normally had a bit more power to it, both audible and

across the aether, but at that moment I could barely muster a solid breath. "The Toppers think I'm dead. The heat's off; I can move, at least for a while, without suspicion."



The meaty hand holding the crystal glass tightened, cracking the stem. "I don't care how free you are to move about. I want my satchel. You understand?" I nodded, but he continued. "Do you remember how heavy that satchel felt? Of course you do, Arch said you were complaining about it when you picked it up. You've handled toadstool before, yes? Think about how light a single one is, dried and pressed. Now, use that quick brain of yours, and do a little math. Now tell me how much toadstool you think was in that satchel."

Shuffling in my seat, I stared hard at the decidedly intricate patterns in the faux oak flooring. "A lot."

"That's right. A lot. A very expensive lot. And do you remember how much Arch paid you - using my money - to deliver that satchel?"

I reddened, blood rushing to my cheeks and sending my already flagging nervous system into a spiral. "A lot."

He leaned forward at that, crushing the crystal in his hand with a grating twist. His face entered the only shadows in the room, highlighting the broad crags of his worn and blasted features. His agitation brought the

pieces of the wine glass to his mouth, and he began chewing while talking. The whirring of his 'teeth' almost drowned him out, but I didn't need to completely understand him, to completely understand him. "You will go to the Toppers. You will get my satchel, AND its contents, back. You will deliver it. This is the most important part, Niles. You get it, yes? I don't care if you show those armored synth-liners you're still alive and annoying. I don't care if you bleed out immediately afterwards. You will do the job you were paid to do, or you'll make me smile." The corner of his mouth twitched, and for one terrible instant, I could see the nightmare inside his mouth. I shuddered, leaning back, rubbing open another injury on the wicker and really not caring.

"I get it. I'll finish the job."

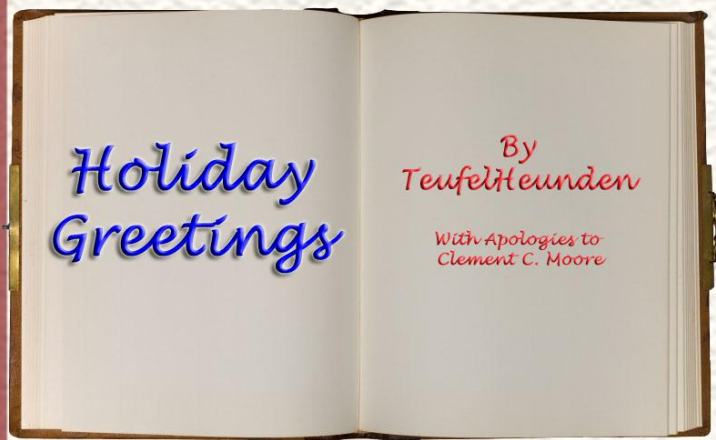
"That's a good boy."

Tears trickled off my face to the floor as he let himself out. I had heard the stories of the Grinner, but never thought it could be that terrible. The door clicked shut. I had learned one important fact; I was working for the wrong people.

Shoving myself to my feet, I staggered back to the foyer to grab my coat. A thumb cranked up the tangle field. It intensified the pain, but leaking injuries wouldn't help me get that satchel back.

It was going to be a long night.





'Twas Midwinter Night's Eve,
and all through the site,
The staff all had writers block,
their outlook seemed blight.
Birched sorted through countless games
with great care,
With courage that some inspiration
might be discovered there.

The members were ravenous
and howled from their threads,
Their claws and their fangs
scraping old dwarven heads.

Birched in his armor
and the staff near his door,
Knew they soon would have to
sum up some glorious lore.

When from deep in the tunnels
came a dreadful ruckus.
Birched and staff stood on edge,
"as the members PM'd us."
Away through the blackness
they sneaked in trepidation,
Standing tall, side by side
a courageous declaration.

With staff near his shoulder
and keyboard at hand,
They crept to the snow-covered,
moonlit, frosty land.

When what to Birched's wide eyes
should appear,
But the ruin of a sled
and eight vicious reindeer.

The driver in red
cracked an evil long whip,
Birched's keyboard began to wobble
and shake in his grip.
Bigger than griffons
the great monsters appeared,
Their incisors sharply exposed,
their antlers like spears.

And as if his whip and dire reindeer
companions weren't enough
He gestured and shouted
and called out his buffs.
"Now Cat's Grace! Spider Climb!
Invisibility!
On mind blank! Reduce Person!
On resist energy!"

Then came to our minds
thoughts that hadn't just yet.
"He's a CR 20! The XP we would get!"
We decided to shoot first,
and ask questions later.
Birched hit first with
Dispel Magic, Greater.
We caught him flatfooted,
and his buffs all dissipated.

He was lean and powerful,
a right evil dwarf,
And we laughed when we saw him,
which caused him to morph,
A grimace on his face,
and a twist of his head,
Soon gave us the belief
we might be quite dead.

His eyes how they blazed,
and his glare was so chilling,
His whip was a beast
to slay the unwilling.
His suit was deep fur,
the color of blood.
His breath stunk
all bitter from under his hood.

A shrill whistle called
the reindeer to fight,
But the staff wrote great prose
and set them alight.
The dice roller rolled,
a magnificent twenty,
With a critical hit,
the staff showed no pity.

The members so loyal
gave a glorious cheer,
The games came a plenty,
a joyful new year.
The staff thanked the members
for all their support,
Their games and great prose,
the staff is proud to purport.

The monsters defeated,
their bodies sent back hell,
The ruckus overcame;
the staff declared all is well.
And Birched shouted
in defeat of the beasts,
"Happy winter to all,
and to all a good feast!"



Short Story



September 2013

Winner:

What Makes a Hero

by SirAlvin

Daemon. I've always hated that name. Ever since I could remember, trouble followed me. I've been travelling for three years now. Given my short and squeaky appearance, you would think that I would stay away from all this senseless brawling but it's something that I must do. It's the only way to spread the truth. And here I was quietly drinking in The Golden Boar, celebrating a successful hunt and buying drinks for everyone, when an orc suddenly pulls me out of the bar and threw me into the muddy ground.

Like I said, trouble always finds me. I have met many orcs and I must say, they are very interesting. I removed my muddy shirt to reveal dozens of markings on my body, words and drawings in red and yellow covering my torso and arms. These were my trophies. I've been hunting a certain murderer responsible for everything that's happened to me. And the moment I heard those wind chimes outside The Golden Boar, I knew that this will be my lucky day. And as I face this ugly, snot-faced orc, I can't help but remember.

****~ ****~ (sound of chimes)

"Hey. Hey... Are you okay?" I slowly opened my eyes, a sharp pain coming behind my head.

"My name is Pakgu Gash-nul from the trading village of Suethi and you are

Daemon, my companion of four years. Can you hear me?" Shouted the handsomest orc I have ever seen. He was carrying me like a damsel in distress into a building. As I managed to open my eyes, bright lights blinded me.

"I think I remember you. Where am I?"

"We are in The Golden Boar. The finest tavern in the capitol. You fainted as you were tying our horses outside." He kept shouting and it was not helping.

"I can't remember anything." I said as people were busy trying to help. Within seconds, I was chewing on some roasted boar's leg and some ginger beer. "What happened?"

"You fell and you must have hit your head on the horse fence. Are you sure you remember nothing? Do you remember who you are?"

"I am the son of a bootmaker from... somewhere. I was travelling with you, wasn't I?"

"Indeed you were. Do you remember anything else?" I tried hard to think. I removed my glove and massaged my eyebrows and on the palm of my left hand was a tattoo. A red smiling face. I have no idea what it means but I know that I made it.

"No. Nothing else." I found it surprising how I seem to be okay with it. After the pain has subsided, I felt normal. Like everything is okay. And how could everything be okay if I have no idea who I am.

"You must be wondering who I am. I am..."

"Pakgu Gash-nul from the trading village of Suethi."

"Oh so you heard me! Or you remember."

"Its here." I raised my coat sleeve and showed him a tattoo on my left hand. It said

Pakgu Gash-nul trading village Suethi in red ink. "I get the feeling I forget things a lot"

"Sadly, you are very accident-prone and every now and then, you end up hitting your head on something hard and lo-..."

"I see." I shouldn't have interrupted him. He looked nervous and worried. He seems really groomed for an orc and everyone here seems to like him.



Pakgu Gash-nul trading village Suethi in red ink. "I get the feeling I forget things a lot"

"Sadly, you are very accident-prone and every now and then, you end up hitting your head on something hard and lo-..."

"I see." I shouldn't have interrupted him. He looked nervous and worried. He seems really groomed for an orc and everyone here seems to like him.

"Are you okay?" He kept looking at me as if I was his son. Was I? Why can't I remember anything? He kept offering me an apple and I couldn't think properly.

"I need to pee. Thank you for everything." His surprise caused him to drop the apple he was holding and I was able to kick it up with my feet and catch it.

"We have a room upstairs. You can wash up there as I settle our tab. Try not to stumble on the stairs Daemon" Whoever Pakgu is, he seems to be the most cultured, behaved and handsomest orc in all of the land. As I walked up to the room, I can't help but wonder about everything. For someone with quite good reflexes, I am said to be accident prone. I removed my gloves and my boots, and I headed for the wash basin in the room.

****~ ****~

That sound, I have heard it before, many times before. I looked out the window to see Pakgu pushing the wagon inside a hut for fear of rain. He fixed the boxes behind it containing various cloths, silverware, candles and bottles and covered all with a thick wool cloth. He then gently reached for the wind chimes on the left end pole of the wagon. He was trying to remove it as per request by some of the sleeping guest.

As I washed my face and peed to my heart's content, I noticed a yellow circle now on my right palm containing an angry face. I removed my shirt and immediately I remembered. I wore my boots and gloves and was about to run down when I heard Pakgu coming up. Pakgu, the orc who took care of me, who served as my friend, my teacher and my father, was on his way. Four years, he's been nothing but good to me.

"Daemon, are you dressed? I'm coming inside." The water basin I had in my hand was not that heavy. But balancing on a chair behind an about to open door while staying absolutely still was a challenge. And for someone who's supposed to be careless and accident-prone, I found it rather easy.

"Daemon? Where are you?" He said after opening the door. He took a step and even from behind the opened door, I can feel him change. What once was heavy footsteps of an orc disappeared. I could hear the sound of a blade being pulled from its sheath along with light footsteps backing away. And before I

missed my chance, I kicked the wooden door close.

It was enough to knock Pakgu down and immediately, I jumped from the chair and went from behind the door to see the orc on his butt. Before he could reach for the dagger that fell a few inches from him, I smashed the water basin on his head causing him to lose consciousness. Running down the stairs, the tavern girls were on their way up, curious of what the crash was about.

"Pakgu fell down. He needs something from his wagon." I said as I ran down to the hut outside. I removed the cloth cover and saw the red and yellow bottles that are also drawn in my torso. A sharp wind whistled past my right ear and the pole holding the wind chimes broke as Pakgu's dagger missed my head by a mere inch. I quickly took the wagon out and readied the horses and with only a few seconds to spare, I was out in the rain with Pakgu shouting behind me as I raced out of the city.

"You can't hide from me Daemon! I will find you" He shouted as he held up the wind chimes in the rain.

****~ ****~

It's been two years since I ran away from Pakgu. I spent most of my time looking for the truth and now I find myself outside the village of Suethi. And what I found out surprised me.

"Excuse me, is this really Suethi? The trading village Suethi?" I asked an elf waiting in line by the local medicine shop.

"It indeed used to be called that but it is now known as Theti, a cleric's village focused on healing" replied the elf.

"Since when?" I must admit, I was indeed confused.

"Why since we won it back against the orcs

who enslaved the potion makers" I have experienced a lot of headaches before but the one I am having now takes the cake. "Are you alright? You don't look okay Daemon."

"What? How did you know my name?"

"It is written across your forehead, child. If there is anything else you need, do not hesitate to ask."

"Just one more. Who is Pakgu Gash-nul?" Heads turned towards me. I could see expressions of shock from the faces of elves, humans, dwarves and even the trees seem to have been quite disturbed by the mere mention of the name. The elf I was talking to quickly grabbed my hand and dragged me.

"Where did you hear that name Daemon?" With his speed and my short legs, I tripped at least a dozen times until we reached a hut where he just barged inside and sat me in front of an elderly woman.

"Who is this person Aras? Why do you bring him here? Said the old lady. I guess it wasn't obvious enough with a name tattooed on your forehead.

"I am not old and I asked who you are and not what your name is." Great, a mind reader.

"I don't know." Said Aras as he looked at me one last time and left the room.

"I am Melian. Now, who are you?" Immediately, my head felt hot, it was as if my brain was boiling. And everything came back. And the sound of wind chimes came.

****~ ****~

I woke up seven years ago by a lake in Southern Klom, face down on the dirt, probably left for death. Around me were corpses, crawling by the looks of it, their faces frozen in pain and their eyes, those blood-red eyes, haunting me every second it

can. I could not stop it, whatever contents my stomach had came rushing out of me, red, but not blood.

I staggered to the lake. I washed my face and pain shot through my body as I fell down. And as I opened my eyes through pain and tears, I saw me. My eyes, my blood-red eyes brimming with dry tears and on my forehead, etched across like a tattoo, was a name,
Daemon.

...

I woke up to a peaceful sound. The wind was playing beautifully and chimes could be heard dancing from afar, The night sky was bright and if it weren't for the dead bodies around me, it would count as a beautiful night. I tried to stand and surprised myself when I managed to. I did what any person would do. I checked the corpses for some copper. Every now and then, I might have accidentally crushed a hand or stepped on a leg, but I needed to survive. As I relieved the gentleman closest to me of his coat and boots, I noticed an empty red bottle in his outstretched hand.

****~ ****~

Without thinking, I grabbed the bottle and ran to the sound.

****~ ****~

"Pakgu Gash-nul." he said to me. "From the trading village of Suethi."

"Daemon." He looked me up and down as if inspecting the quality of a merchandise. He took his lamp and held it to my face making me squint my eyes, and for a second I saw something. He placed his lamp back on its perch and before I could say anything, he tossed me a piece of bread and a waterskin.

"Here's the deal human..."

"I can understand you. Am I speaking

orcish?"

"What? No, if you must know, I am educated in the ways of man. It took me 18 years to learn your language, culture and trades. Now finish that bread as I prepare a space for you in the wagon."

"So you are a cultured orc merchant?" I said after finishing my bread.

"I am Pakgu Gash-nul from the trading village of..."

"Where are you heading?" I asked as I drank almost half of the contents of the waterskin.

"I am on my way to the capitol to sell some trinkets I acquired from my last stop." He just finished rearranging his wagon and had all his stuff covered in the back. All I could see was a box of red bottles when he offered me a seat beside him. "Would you like to come with me?"

"How much will it cost me?"

"The seven pieces of copper coins in your right pocket is more than enough." Again, I saw it. The faint smile of a man who has successfully tricked someone. Still, I have no intentions of staying here.

"Deal." I climbed up into his wagon and as I looked back, I could see the wind chimes tied to a pole by the end of his wagon. "I find the sound of the wind chimes comforting. And this specific set of chimes is one of a kind and very expensive. I bought it from a bootmaker in Southern Klom. I collect things you see."



"Don't you want to know where I came from? Or who I am." I interrupted him. I felt the need to talk about what I saw, about what I survived.

"We are all running away from something. And I know who you are, it says so on your forehead."

"Aren't you a bit curious? What if I'm dangerous."

"You are a good 2 feet shorter than me and I think I can defend myself" He snorted and laughed as he kept talking about how a fight would go down if it ever did between us. How he would have so much trouble punching me since I was too small. It was a strange sight.

As I looked back at the direction of the lake, I can't help but wonder what exactly I've been through. And now, I am in a wagon with a very strange travelling orc on a bumpy ride to the capitol. Who knows what could happen.

****~ ****~

I woke up. Somehow, I was dressed now in a white cotton tunic and a pair of jeans. Aras was sitting on a table looking at some things. "Good morning Daemon"

"What happened?" I stood up and tried walking to him and immediately lost my balance. Aras was somehow already by my side as he guided me to the table.

"You remembered." And on the table were pictures. I recognized the drawings since I made them but I don't recall doing so. The first one was a man standing in the door of a shop pointing at a sign above him that says "Daemon Boots".

"I know him. He is my father, the bootmaker."

"Look at the door." On the door where wind

chimes, the exact same wind chimes that Pakgu has been carrying. The second drawing was of a young me sitting on my father's shoulders watching a handsome orc showing off a yellow bottle to the entire town.

"That's Pakgu."

"Look at the color of the bottle." Aras pulled out a red bottle. It was the bottle I've been hiding all this time. And it was red. The last drawing was of me lying in bed and my father arguing with Pakgu.

"What's the meaning of this? I still don't understand."

"You will. Now get some more rest." As I laid back down, I remembered my father's face, the face of a happy man, always smiling and always sacrificing himself. How could I have ever forgotten his face, the face of the man who sacrificed everything for me, the face of the man who made the best boots in all of Klom, the face of the corpse closest to me holding out the red bottle for me to drink.

"Quickly Daemon, drink it. It's the only cure for the poison. Hurry up." He shoved the medicine into my mouth and immediately, I felt numb and dizzy. I saw the rest of the village chasing after us. He was carrying me while running to the lake. In the distance, I saw Pakgu taking the wind chimes from my father's shop down. And then suddenly, the other villagers started collapsing. We were almost by the lake when my father fell down.

"Finish it all Daemon, finish the antidote. You will forget all of this. He promised. But please remember who you are." He kept reaching for me but I could not move. I was sleepy and wide awake at the same time, paralyzed as I listened to the cries of the village and the sound of my father crawling to me. The last thing I saw was an orcish hand pouring something in my mouth and the last thing I heard was the sound of wind chimes.

****~ ****~

"I left the village the day after and began telling everyone about you. How you trick people into buying your yellow poison bottles and then telling my village that you only had one antidote left when truthfully you had lots of it. And how said antidote erases all of the taker's memories giving you a chance to make them believe whatever you want." I said as I faced down the once was known as the handsomest orc of them all.

"They never believe me at first. Most of the time I had to convince them by force with the help of Aras and his remind you of the past trick. And even after remembering, they refused to tell me where you are." I said as Pakgu's eyes began turning red.

"What did you do?" Asked Pakgu as he fell on his knees.

"I gave you a taste of your own medicine. If I'm right, yellow is poison and red is antidote but the antidote makes you forget. How many times have you given me the red bottle?" Pakgu was now on the ground, crying as the poison overtook his entire body. Daemon leisurely walked up to him and poured the contents of a red bottle into his mouth. He then took out the dagger from Pakgu's belt and wrote "Pakgu" on his forehead.





Agrarian Traditions for Your Game

It may be a rash generalization, but for most D&D-style fantasy games, the society is based around agriculture. The year is primarily marked by when it's time to plant, when to harvest, and so on. The seasons are based on the sun, so once the society has figured out that there's a shortest day of the year, we have our first winter holiday. (Now someone in the Southern Hemisphere is pointing out that it's about to be summer there. Yes, I'll get to you, too, but you're going to have to wait for the Midsummer writeup.)

Quick disclaimer: I don't know everything, for all I might like to (and occasionally claim otherwise). If I contradict something you know, feel free to point it out, but I apologize in advance. At the same time, I've spent some time studying traditions, and if you're interested, I'm happy to share more if you want me to.

Yule (Winter Solstice)

Scientifically speaking, the winter solstice is the point where the Earth's axis tilts the hemisphere farthest away from the Sun. Now, regardless of your game setting, there's likely going to be a similar point for <your planet here>. Yes, you can come up with logical situations where the seasons might be different, but I doubt you use them too often. For our purposes, let's assume that most settings will have a winter solstice. There are a variety of names we use, most based around the god or gods that were associated

with the holiday. I often use 'Longnight' in D&D or Pathfinder games because it is descriptive but doesn't specify the godly associations, making it easy to use regardless of what deities exist for the setting.

So the question becomes how do we celebrate that solstice? No, we don't have a jolly fat man in red in each store and home. The commercial aspects of our secular Christmas do not apply (unless you want them to). The solstice is celebrated as the point where the sun starts coming back, giving longer days from then until summer. Sun gods (or the birth of a god) are often involved in the mythos, growing to power over the next months. Struggle between opposing forces sometimes flips at the solstice. Often fires throughout the long night symbolize the desire for the sun to return... maybe you've heard of the Yule log, which was burned throughout the night and a tiny piece saved to kindle the next year's fire, perpetuating the cycle of the year. (Yule is from the Old Norse, meaning "wheel".) Many cultures would hunt and kill the wren, symbol of winter, making a sacrifice to turn the year back toward summer.

Try incorporating evergreens into the winter traditions of your game. Green, from the evergreens, and red from many winter berries are traditional colors, along with wintry blues, whites, and silver. Snow motifs are popular, as are spices that warm you up; cinnamon is good, so are frankincense and myrrh. Wood scents like pine and cedar linger when fires are kept burning, and they can be found in the poorest household, unlike the more exotic spices.

Imbolc

Usually February 1st or 2nd, Imbolc is the halfway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. It means "ewe's milk", referring to the start of the lambing season, and marks the beginning of spring changes. New buds start to appear. Animal

patterns change around now, hibernating animals starting to come out again; Germany's "Badger's Day" became "Groundhog Day" in America. Weather divination is popular around this time, as hopes for the warm weather grow.

Candles are popular (and spawned the 'Candlemas' and 'Candelaria' names), regardless of which culture's traditions. Young women wore crowns of lights to represent the maiden goddess. Thoughts turn toward fertility and the sun gaining strength. For those who know the goddess Brigid, her influences were inspiration, craft, and healing, all of which she shares with her followers on this holiday. Many cultures have some tradition that is thought to make women fertile, ranging from straw dolls put to bed with male symbols to priests lashing women with goatskin thongs. Given the wide range, for a game world, if you can make up a logical reason for something to relate to fertility, you can probably make it work.



Summer in the Southern Hemisphere

Just as Australia is getting warmer and heading for Midsummer, your games might not always stay in one place. Magic (or large wings) could easily transport your character from winter to summer without changing the calendar date. Perhaps your game stays in warm areas of the setting and there is no winter at all. This is up to you, but I hope the ideas and traditions presented here might spark inspiration.

This is a great holiday to include in your games, precisely because when you've been cooped up all winter long, you start to get antsy and eager to be moving again. A first thaw holiday is an excuse for agrarian society to get out and see others, even if they're sharing meals indoors and still stuck inside. If you can link warmth, the start of new cycles, and wishes for the coming year, you've got a great holiday. Try red and pink for decorations, and whether it's spring cleaning or lighting candles to symbolize a new phase, you can enjoy the holiday at whatever level you want. I've always linked scents like sandalwood and lemon to this holiday, things that make me think of cleaning or purifying for a fresh season.



Short Story



November 2013

Winner:

The Test
by GeneT

Josua stamped his feet upon the welcome mat and shook the umbrella before entering the house. Rain lingered upon his shoulders, little beads like gems, translucent with distorted light, images unclear. He brushed them off when inside and they sparkled as they fell to the wooden floor, fracturing into little winks of light. He leaned his umbrella into the corner, alone it stood, slightly askew, like an old forgotten man, used up and standing in the soup line, partly wet and frayed around the edges from the biting wind. His coat, now hanging high upon the hook, felt vindicated.

He walked the short distance in and was headed as usual to the kitchen down the hallway for a spot of tea when sight of his wife stopped him in the halfway space of the arch that led to the main room. Caught by her outline as she hunched over a box sitting upon the small table in front of the couch, he hovered uncertain, transfixed as if peering into bright lights. There was no leaving. The sound of his arriving was indisputable.

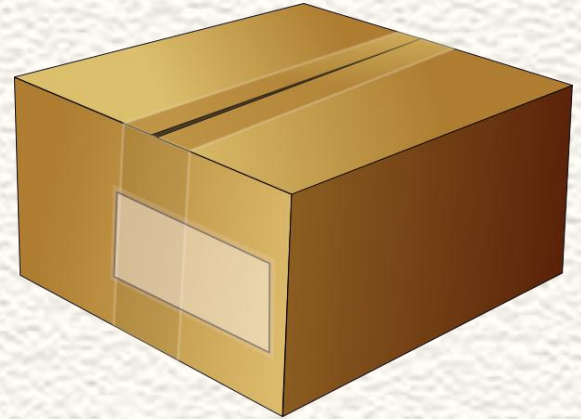
"It's here," she said without turning.

"What?"

"The Baby."

The box was plain, brown cardboard with postal tape sealing the seams and edges. Emily had signed for it, her hand shaking,

name ineligible. But it didn't matter, the clock did not start until the box was opened and the contents spilled upon the floor, the button that resembled a turkey timer pulled, the instructions disregarded, and that first cry echoed through the house.



name ineligible. But it didn't matter, the clock did not start until the box was opened and the contents spilled upon the floor, the button that resembled a turkey timer pulled, the instructions disregarded, and that first cry echoed through the house.

Emily wondered if it had been like this for her mother. If the box had been just as small. How she had managed to pass the test. What wisdom she could have imparted. But her mother was dormant, sleeping and no longer In-sync. They would not meet again for fifteen years and Emily would have to tell her memories in half pieces of story; how she managed the first days of hunger and crying, the next week the middle years of hand holding and accidents that needed soft words with cuddling, the suffering long week of teen years of building tension and loss, and the waiting for the letter of Rejection or Approval to Artificially Conceive after Parental Testing was complete.

"I thought we talked about this."

"We applied."

"But.."

"I applied."

The intervening silence commiserated with Josua, unwilling to give up its dominance, the heavy moments that it covered Emily as she lay awake in bed, eyes open as he slept, the yearning in her blanketed by his breathing. She slit the taped seam with the long nail of her thumb. There was no sending it back now. There was no putting it on the porch to be picked up undisturbed and refused.

"I did not agree to this Em."

"Then leave."

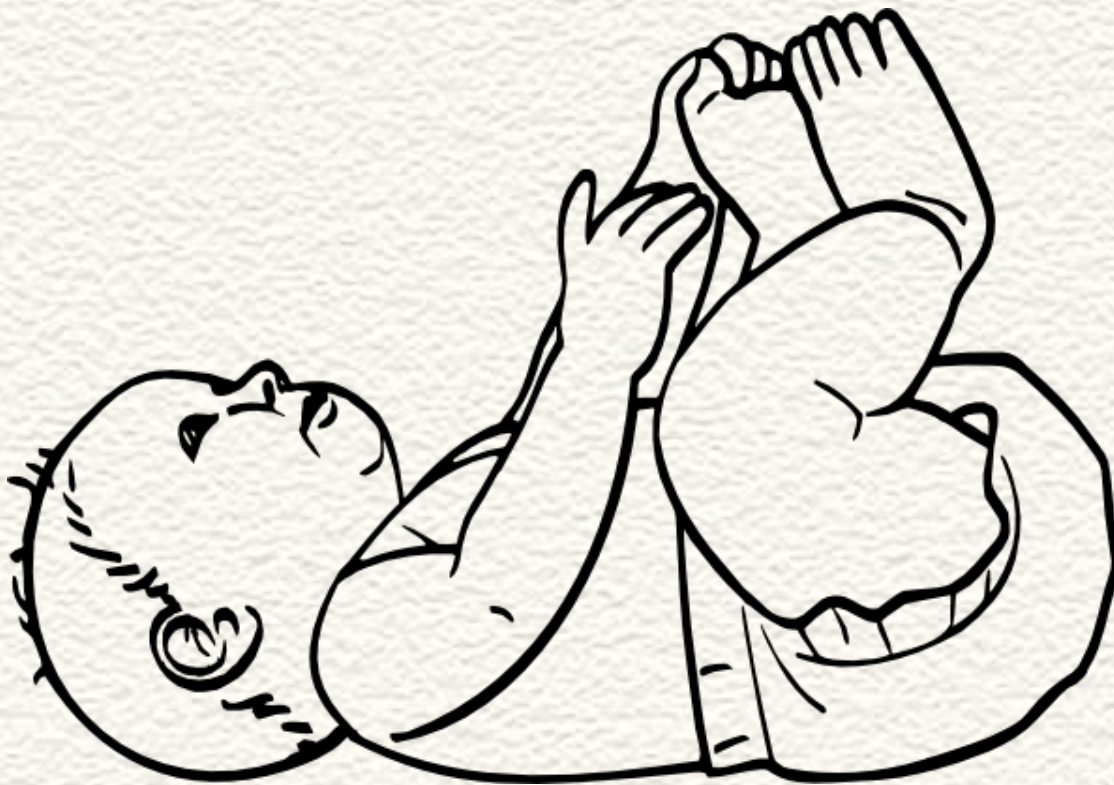
"And you think to pass the Test alone."

The rest of the enclosing tape yielded with a squeal as she ripped the top open and answered him. She removed the instruction sheet and cast it aside and carefully lifted it out, its face silent under the clear plastic wrapping. It seemed too small, too delicate. She teased the wrapping off, carefully unrolling it, round and under, and round and over, until it was free. Cradling it, beaming,

she looked over her shoulder and found the arch empty, the wind of the storm blowing through the open front door throwing spent leaves the color of embers across the floor.

Alone, she hesitated. Josua was right. She would fail, but unlike him she would suffer in the attempt whereas he had given up at the start. In the end, what was in her would wither, desiccate, shrivel into a normal life. She would sleep. She would wake. Now alone, she would shift her In-sync Pattern countless times with only herself as a constant. And for what?

Looking down, Emily realized she had activated the Test. She had started the process, her fingers caressing its soft skin pulling the timer as she lamented his leaving. It squirmed in her arms and it didn't matter that it was not real, not living, that it was a replica made for the Testing. All that mattered were its large brown eyes and the warmth it began to blossom. The rest could be learned by some degree of failing. Remembering what we had been. That's what her mother would say.



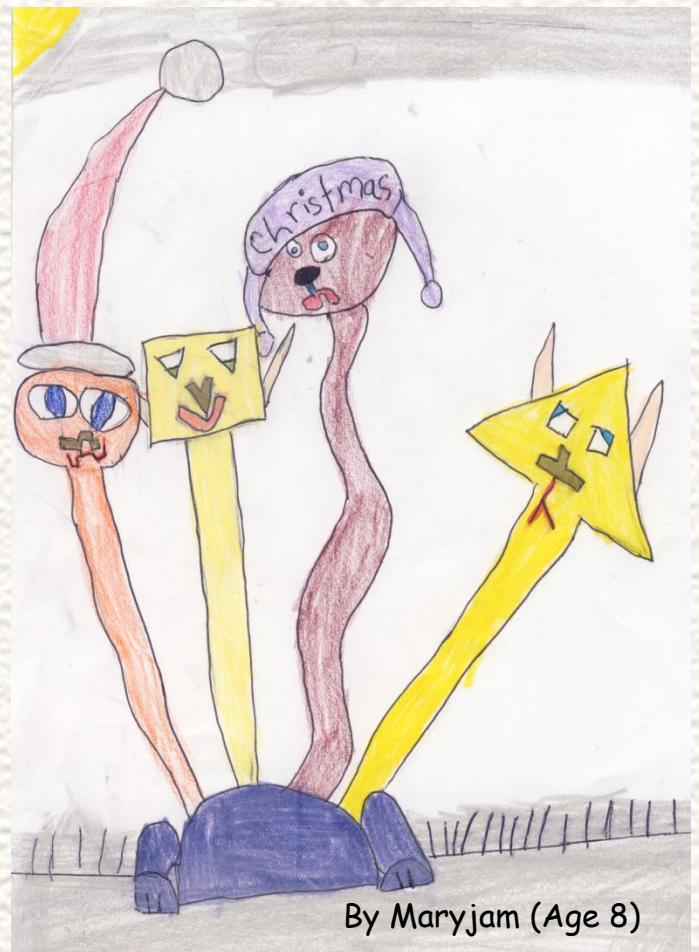
RPG Crossing Cadets



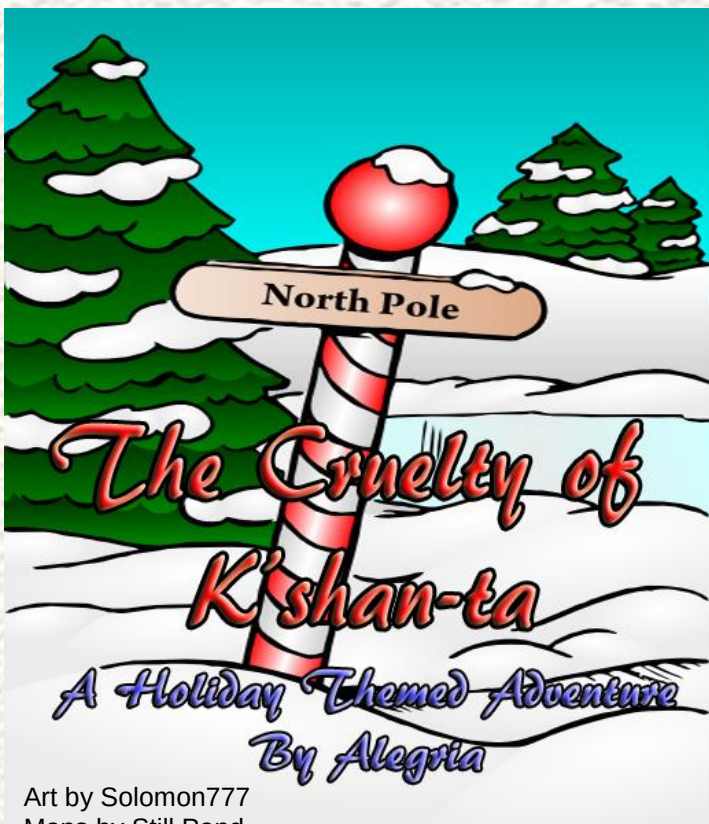
This section is dedicated to the creative offerings of the children of our site members. If you would like to contribute, see the [RPG Crossing Cadets Thread](#).



By Candyphlox (Age 11)



By Maryjam (Age 8)



Art by Solomon777
Maps by Still Pond

Christmas Themed One-Shot for D&D 4e

This adventure was created for four level 5 adventurers. Each encounter below will recommend how to scale the encounter for 5 – 7 adventurers. Players may not take an extended rest during this adventure or they will freeze to death.

Read to Players

*'Twas the solstice of winter,
and all through the land,
Your people were suffering under
K'shan-ta's cruel hand.*

*You'd escaped from his grasp
at a tender young age,
To seek out your fortunes
as ranger or mage.*

*But now you are stronger,
and ready to fight;
To throw off the shackles
and end the elves' plight.*

*So you've headed north-homeward,
to face the Red King,
And usher the Elflands
to a vibrant new spring.*

Encounter 1

Read to Players

You head into the wintry northland, garbed in heavy furs to protect you from the cold. The only entrance to the Elflands that you know of is a pass that cuts through otherwise impenetrable mountains. You enter the pass and trek several miles through heavy snowfall that obscures your vision. Halfway through the pass, barely visible at a distance of 100 feet, stands a 20 foot tall snowman. Its charcoal black eyes have not yet spotted your approach. You know this creature to be Frosty the Snow Lord and he will let no one but K'shan-ta pass unchallenged. The snow makes movement here difficult. Roll initiative.

Map A: Frosty stands in the middle of the pass 100 feet from the closest player character (PC).

Skill Checks

Make the skill and result of these checks known to the players at the start of the encounter.

Arcana (medium): A check as part of another action that has the fire keyword to clear snow from a square. This can also be done with a simple minor action check.

Endurance (easy): A minor action check to ignore difficult terrain.

Athletics (hard): A check as part of a move action to climb the sides of the pass.

Stealth (medium): A check as part of a move action to hide in the snow.

Nature (easy): A minor action check to clear snow from a square.

Once snow is cleared for the first time area, tell the players:

Areas where snow is removed become normal terrain for PCs and difficult terrain for Frosty.



Monsters

Avalanche

Trap: Crushing snow and ice fall when shaken loose from the walls of the pass.

Trigger: Any critical hit or the use of any power with the thunder keyword.

Attack: Immediate reaction Blast 3

Target: The square against the wall of the pass closest to the triggering source. Attack: +10 vs Reflex

Hit: 3d6 + 9 damage

Miss: Half damage

Effect: Squares in the blast become snowy, difficult terrain.

This is a two part encounter that is equivalent to 1 solo monster. Start the combat with Frosty the Snow Lord. When Frosty dies, read the following passage and immediately begin combat with Jack Frost (no short rest).

Read to Players

Frosty the Snow Lord crumbles into piles of snow upon the floor of the pass. From inside the shattered snowman emerges a medium-sized elf with light blue skin. He wears black leather armor lined by white fur. "I'm free!!!" he calls out excitedly. His smile turns into a sinister grin full of pointy teeth. As he turns towards you, long thin claws extend from his fingers. "I'm hungry," he hisses like cracking ice. "Very hungry". Roll initiative. A history check may be made to know more about the blue elf.

For each player above 4, add one Dire Wolf (Monster Manual, skirmisher).

Skill Checks

History (easy): The blue elf is none other than Jack Frost, who disappeared a century ago. Stories say that Jack Frost angered K'shan-ta by stealing K'shan-ta's favorite snow globe. Either, Jack Frost was imprisoned by Frosty at K'shan-ta's order or Jack hid from K'shan-ta inside Frosty and became trapped.

Treasure

If the players search Jack Frost, they will recover a snow globe containing an exquisitely sculptured ice castle. There is nothing magical about it.

Encounter 2

Read to Players

After traveling for several more hours, you emerge from the pass onto the icy plains of Elfland. K'shan-ta's keep is several miles north. You start to cross the icy wastes, leaving the snow storm behind. Occasional boulders and ice blocks litter the otherwise flat ice plain. From behind one particularly large boulder, a group of stag princes take position to block your path. The stag prince you recognize as Prancer tells you, "You are not welcome here. Turn back now. Or, if you prefer, give up your weapons and return to the service of K'shan-ta where you belong."

Map B: Some litter should provide cover or total cover. Some litter should allow players to climb upon them to height of no more than 2 squares (10 feet).

Read to Players

The icy terrain makes movement challenging. If a PC moves more than 3 squares, and fails a free action Acrobatics skill check (easy), the PC falls prone at the end of the move. A player may spend a minor action BEFORE they move to automatically succeed the Acrobatics skill check. If a PC moves their full move speed, the PC must slide 1 more square in the same direction as the last square of movement and grant Combat Advantage to any adjacent enemies until the start of the players next turn.

Monsters

The 8 stag princes look like reindeer and are referenced by their reindeer names. However, use the stats and powers of the creatures listed for each stag prince. Stag princes are not affected by the icy terrain. Feel free to start some of the lurker and artillery stag princes hidden behind boulders or ice blocks (do not tell the players about the hidden creatures until the stag princes attack or are discovered).

Dasher: Orc Raider (Monster Manual, skirmisher)

Dancer: Iron Defender (Monster Manual, soldier)

Prancer: Poisonscale Collector (Monster Manual 2, lurker)

Vixen: Hobgoblin Warcaster (Monster Manual, controller)

Comet: Kenku Warrior (Monster Manual 2, skirmisher)

Cupid: Kobold Wyrmpriest (Monster Manual, artillery)

Donner: Bullywug Mud Lord (Monster Manual 2, artillery)

Blitzen: Bullywug Mud Lord (Monster Manual 2, artillery)

For each player above 4, add one Fey Panther (Monster Manual, skirmisher) described as a snow leopard.



Encounter 3

Read to Players

You finally reach the keep of K'shan-ta and the gate of the keep opens as you arrive. First out of the gate comes Rudolph the Stag King. Rudolph is the slave master and ensures that K'shan-ta's will be done. His nose begins to glow a hellish red, signaling that everything is prepared for one final grand entrance.

K'shan-ta saunters out of the keep wearing his red and white armor to greet the traitors who have returned years after their death-defying escape. The Red King's belly is even larger than you remember. His black boots are stained with blood. "Welcome back," he greets you. "My gift to you is torture and imprisonment for what you have done. I will see to it personally. Ho ho ho."

Map C: Ice Spikes are jagged spikes of ice that stick out of the ground at odd angles. They take up a square, do not provide cover or concealment, and cause 5 damage if a creature slides (or is slid) into a square adjacent to them.

Interaction

If the PCs offer to return K'shan-ta's snow globe, K'shan-ta will become very excited and offer to imprison them without torture for its return. Tell the players that the snow globe distracts K'shan-ta. An easy Insight skill check would discern that K'shan-ta would be at a disadvantage if they attacked just after returning the snow globe.

If the PCs return the snow globe to K'shan-ta at any point, they will earn themselves a free surprise round (before or in the middle of combat) and gain +2 to all dice rolls during that surprise round. If the PCs fail to return the snow globe after mentioning it to K'shan-ta, K'shan-ta will get +2 added to all dice rolls until it is returned. After the first time K'shan-ta attacks with the +2 modifier, tell the players that K'shan-ta has been enraged by the party's refusal to return the snow globe and it has made him more vicious than usual.

Monsters

Rudolph: Oni Night Hunter (Monster Manual, elite controller)

K'shan-ta: Ettin Wrath Chanter (Monster Vault, elite controller)

If you feel the players need more of a challenge, because they won too easily in previous encounters or start winning too easily in this encounter, have this creature emerge from the keep after the start of combat ...

Sugarplum Fairy: Beholder Gauth (Monster Manual 2, elite artillery)

For each player above 4, add one Chillborn Zombie (Monster Manual, soldier).



Frosty the Snow Lord

Large aberrant magical beast

Level 7 Solo Soldier

HP 166; Bloodied 83

AC 23, Fortitude 21, Reflex 18, Will 18

Speed 6 on snow (bare ground is difficult terrain)

Resist 15 fire

Vulnerable 10 fire

Saving Throws +5; Action Points 2

Initiative +8

Perception +11

Darkvision

TRAITS

Action Recovery

Whenever Frosty ends its turn, any dazing, stunning, or dominating effect on it ends.

Instinctive Assault

On an initiative of 10 + its initiative check, Frosty can use a free action to freeze the ground in a close burst 1, covering the ground with snow if there is no snow and causing 7 cold damage to any enemies in the burst. If Frosty cannot use a free action to make this attack due to a dominating or stunning effect, then that effect ends instead of Frosty making the attack.

STANDARD ACTIONS

⬇️ Frozen Fists ⬆️ At-Will

Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +12 vs. AC. If Frosty targets only one creature, it can make this attack twice against that creature

Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage. If it has no creatures grabbed, Frosty grabs the target (escape DC 16). If the target is a creature it has grabbed, Frosty dazes the target until the end of Frosty's next turn.

⬅️ Arctic Breath (cold) ⬆️ Recharge ☄️ ☄️

Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +10 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d12 + 7 cold damage, or 2d12 + 17 cold damage while Frosty is bloodied.

Miss: Half damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

⬇️ Snow Sweep ⬆️ At-Will

Trigger: An enemy leaves a square within 2 squares of Frosty.

Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 3 (the triggering enemy); +10 vs. Reflex

Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone.

⬅️ Bloodied Blast ⬆️ Encounter

Trigger: Frosty is first bloodied.

Effect (Free Action): Arctic breath recharges, and Frosty uses it.

Skills Endurance +10, Insight +11

Str 22 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+6)

Con 19 (+7) **Int** 11 (+3) **Cha** 14 (+5)

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common

Jack Frost

Medium aberrant magical humanoid

Level 6 Solo Skirmisher

HP 140; **Bloodied** 70

AC 20, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16

Speed 8

Resist 15 cold

Vulnerable 10 fire

Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Initiative +7

Perception +8

Darkvision

TRAITS

⚙ **Killing Presence** (necrotic) + **Aura** 2

Any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 necrotic damage.

⚙ **Tainted Wounds** + **Aura** 5

While Jack Frost is bloodied, enemies within the aura regain only half the normal hit points from healing effects.

Double Actions

At the start of combat, Jack Frost makes two initiative checks. Jack Frost takes a turn on both initiative counts.

Unstoppable

Jack Frost cannot be immobilized or restrained. When an attack would knock Jack Frost prone, Jack Frost can make a saving throw to remain standing.

STANDARD ACTIONS

⬇ **Bite** + **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC

Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of Jack Frost's next turn.

⬇ **Raking Assault** + **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC

Hit: 2d10 + 3 damage, and Jack Frost shifts 4 squares and then uses bite.

MINOR ACTIONS

Blending (illusion) + **Encounter**

Effect: Jack Frost becomes invisible until it attacks or until the end of its next turn.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

⬇ **Unspeakable Violation** (necrotic) + **Recharge** [1]

Trigger: Jack Frost hits an enemy with bite.

Attack (Free Action): Melee 1 (the triggering enemy); +9 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target loses a healing surge, and Jack Frost's killing presence aura deals 10 necrotic damage instead of 5 necrotic damage during Jack Frost's next turn.

Shadow Evasion + **Recharge** when first bloodied

Trigger: An enemy hits Jack Frost with a melee or a ranged attack.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): Jack Frost shifts 4 squares and then becomes insubstantial until the end of the triggering enemy's next turn.

Skills Stealth +10

Str 19 (+7)

Dex 15 (+5)

Wis 11 (+3)

Con 14 (+5)

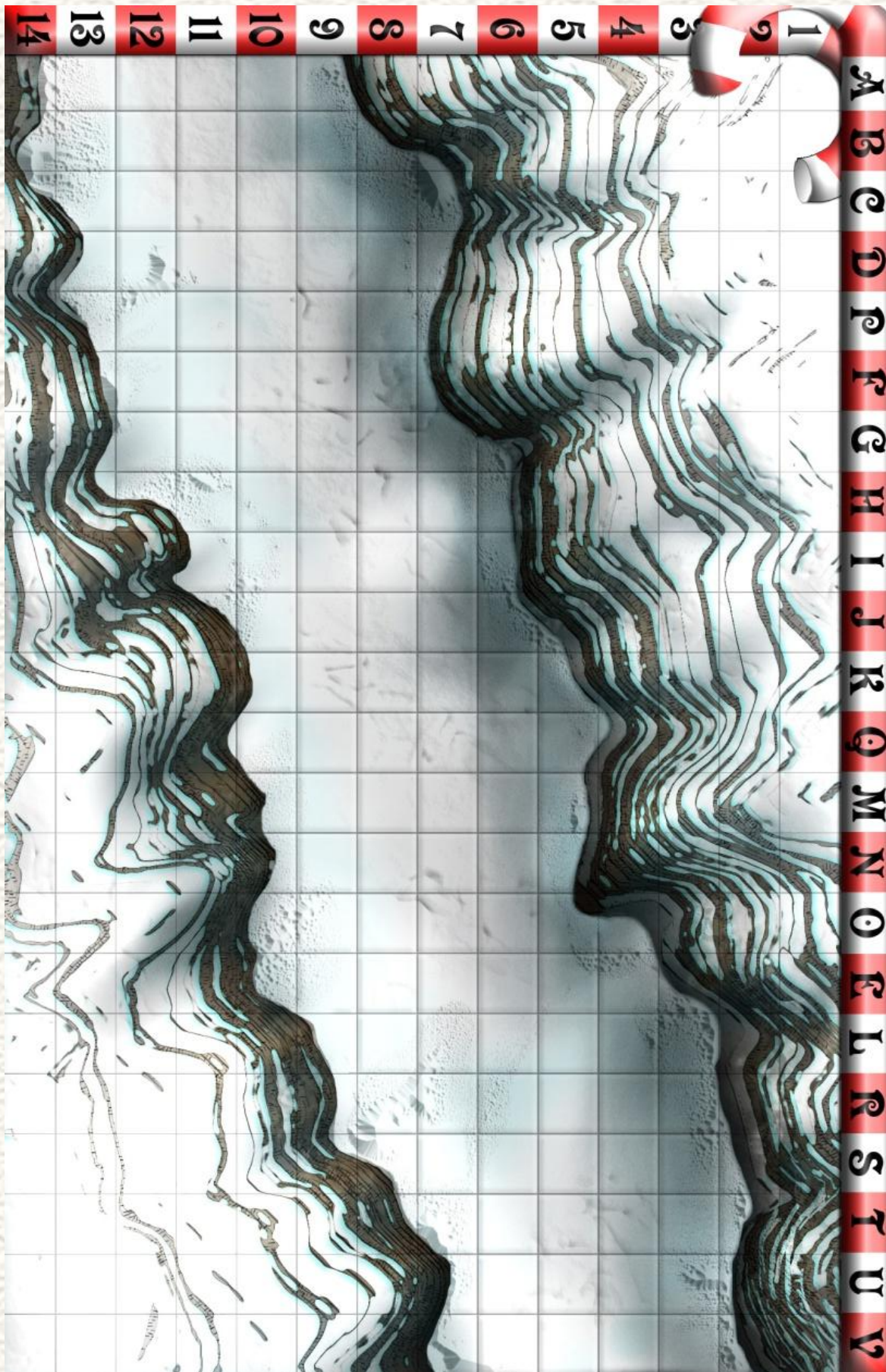
Int 13 (+4)

Cha 9 (+2)

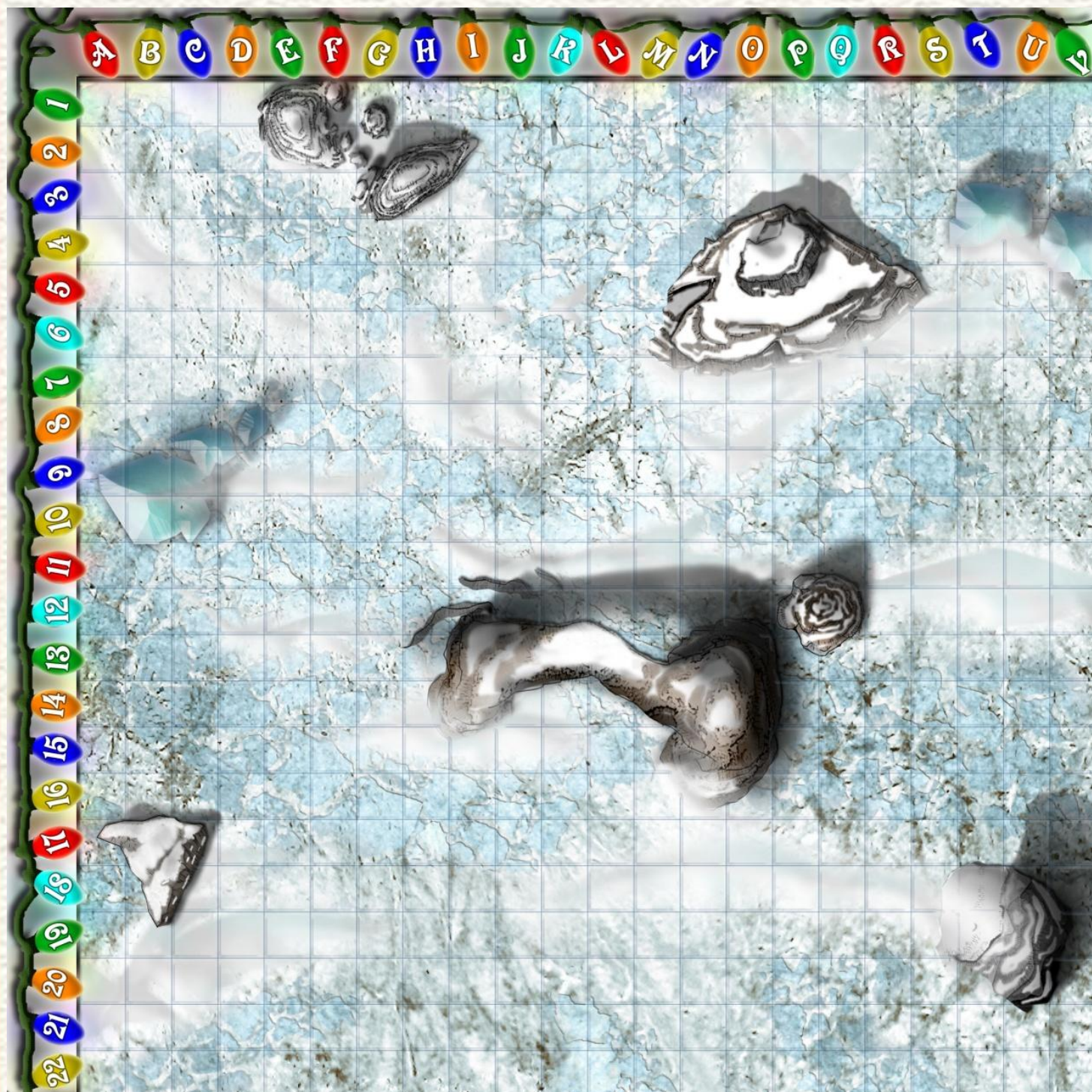
Alignment Chaotic Evil

Languages Common

Map A



Map B



Map C



Constables

Written by ER Staff; Illustrated by LadyOfHats; Created by RoBi

